beauties, Yang Kuei-fei. Yang Kuei-fei had been the wife of one of the sons of Hsiian Tsung, but in 738 she was taken by the Emperor into his own household as his chief favorite. She encouraged her infatuated imperial master, now in his fifties, in a life of extravagance and gayety. Members of her family were given high rank, but neither she nor they appear to have had political ability to match her feminine charms. In his old age Hsiian Tsung was unable or unwilling to throw off her baleful influence and power began slipping from his weakening hands.

The rebellion which proved the final undoing of Hsiian Tsung was led by An Lu-shan, an able fellow of non-Chinese stock who had first acquired distinction in Chinese service by aiding in repressing some of the raids of the Khitans, had risen high in the favor of the Emperor and of Yang Kuei-fei, and had been given an important military command. In 755 An Lu-shan unfurled the standard of revolt in the Northeast, was soon master of most of the territory north of the Yellow River, and proclaimed himself Emperor. The aged Hsiian Tsung fled from Ch'angan to Szechwan. On the way, the imperial troops either themselves put to death or obtained the execution of Yang Kuei-fei and some of her family. Hsiian Tsung, now seventy years of age and thoroughly discredited, abdicated (756) in favor of one of his sons. He lived on, in seclusion, until 762, long enough to see the rebellion crushed. An Lu-shan was killed by his own son (757) and the murderer in his turn perished at the hands of another rebel of non-Chinese stock, Shih Ssii-ming. The T'ang forces retook Ch'angan (757), aided by contingents from Central

Asia, including some Arabs. Shih Ssu-ming proclaimed himself Emperor, but within a few years was destroyed by his own eldest son and shortly afterward the latter was overthrown and put to death by the T'ang forces.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE T³ANG DYNASTY

The rebellion of An Lu-shan marked the beginning of the end of the T'ang. The Li family held the throne for nearly a century and a half longer, and the brilliance of the era, although waning, displayed occasional temporary revivals. From the reign of Hsiian Tsung, however, the course of the house of Li Yuan was downward.